

Forbeck Foundation

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER • XLII EDITION



CANCER'S LEADING THINKERS. TOGETHER IN ONE ROOM.



Ruby Heart Tribute Wall From 2025 Blue Jean Ball

A YEAR OF GROUNDBREAKING CONVERSATIONS

From the snowy slopes of Aspen to the historic halls of an Irish castle, 2025 proved to be a landmark year for cancer research collaboration. Thirteen cutting-edge scientific Forbeck Forums brought together the world's leading researchers, clinicians, and innovators to tackle some of the most pressing challenges in cancer treatment—and the insights gained are already shaping the future of patient care.

Cancer is not a single disease, and it doesn't respond the same way in everyone. The Foundation's intimate focused gatherings brought together experts who rarely work in the same room, fostering the kind of cross-pollination of ideas that lead to breakthrough discoveries. Each Forum was carefully designed to bridge gaps between disciplines—connecting cancer biologists with immunologists, computer scientists with clinicians, and laboratory researchers with patient advocates.

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A YEAR OF GROUNDBREAKING CONVERSATIONS



FORBECK TEAM
AARON, JAMIE & MARLA

UNDERSTANDING CANCER'S DIVERSITY

FEBRUARY 27–MARCH 2

The year kicked off with a critical conversation about sex differences in cancer. Why do men and women develop different cancers at different rates? Why do they respond differently to the same treatments? Led by Dr. Defne Bayik and Dr. Amy Moran at the Hilton Denver Inverness, this Forum explored how understanding these differences can lead to more personalized, effective therapies for everyone.

LISTENING TO WHAT TUMORS DON'T SAY

MARCH 27–30

Tumors are complex ecosystems. Beyond cancer cells, tumors are filled with supporting actors such as fibroblasts and immune cells that help cancers grow and resist treatment. The Asilomar Forum, chaired by Dr. Sara Zanivan and Dr. Max Mazzone, brought together international experts to decode the hidden conversations between these cells and discover how to disrupt them.

THE POWER PLANT PROBLEM

APRIL 3–6 & MAY 15–18

Two separate Forums tackled mitochondria—the tiny powerhouses inside every cell. When these structures malfunction, they can fuel cancer's growth. One Forum explored fundamental biology “from worms to patients” at Evin's Mill, while another at Asilomar examined how targeting mitochondria might supercharge immunotherapy. These meetings represent a bet that understanding cellular energy could unlock entirely new treatment strategies.

REWRITING THE CANCER PLAYBOOK

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Several Forums challenged how we think about cancer at its most fundamental level:

- In May at The Mollie in Aspen, researchers examined how RNA molecules, the messengers between DNA and proteins, influence cancer's behavior across multiple cancer types including pancreatic, breast, lung, and colorectal cancers.
- At Ireland's Dunboyne Castle in September, experts explored what happens when cancer cells refuse to die, hiding from treatment only to return later in a form that is resistant to therapy.
- Another September gathering, at Italy's Castello Dal Pozzo, focused on how the DNA within cancer cells is constantly changing, with major implications for aggressive forms of the disease like glioblastoma, neuroblastoma, and ovarian cancer.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) ENTERS THE LAB

OCTOBER 19–22

Perhaps no Forum symbolized the future more than the AI meeting at The Mollie in Aspen. Dr. Peter Winter and Dr. Barbara Engelhardt led groundbreaking discussions on how artificial intelligence is transforming cancer research and drug discovery, potentially compressing years of laboratory work into months of computational analysis.



WALK THE LAKE

FOR KIRA FAITH

10 / 03 / 2026

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ADVANCING PRECISION MEDICINE

OCTOBER 5–8 AND OCTOBER 16–19

October saw two additional critical meetings. At Lake Geneva’s Bella Vista resort, Dr. Jay Sarthy and Dr. Laura Banaszynski brought together pediatric and adult cancer experts, biologists, chemists, and drug developers to explore mutations in histone proteins—the structures that are associated with DNA in our cells. Subtle changes in these proteins have been linked to many types of cancer, particularly in children and young adults. New drugs targeting these mutations are now entering clinical trials.

At Evin’s Mill in Tennessee, Dr. Kristopher Sarosiek and Dr. Cristina Munoz Pinedo gathered experts to discuss cell death in cancer therapy—understanding why some cancer cells resist dying when treated and how to overcome resistance across pediatric and adult cancers.

THE LONG ROAD AFTER TREATMENT

OCTOBER 26–29

Thanks to improving treatments, more children are surviving cancer than ever before. But survival raises new questions: What are the long-term effects of treatment? How can we prevent secondary cancers in survivors? Two back-to-back Forums at The Abbey in Lake Geneva, supported by Curing Kids Cancer, focused on these vital questions. Leading researchers including Dr. Greg Armstrong, Dr. Lindsay Morton, Dr. Melissa Hudson, Dr. Lisa Diller, and Dr. Tara Henderson gathered to ensure that childhood cancer survivors can live full, healthy lives.

METABOLIC WARFARE AGAINST CANCER

NOVEMBER 13–16

The year concluded with a meeting on one of cancer research’s most promising frontiers: immunometabolism. At the W Mexico City, Dr. Navdeep Chandel and Dr. Susan Kaech led discussions on how cancer cells create hostile environments preventing immune cells from attacking them. By understanding and manipulating cellular metabolism, researchers explored ways to “recharge” immune cells and transform immunotherapy from a treatment that works in 20-30% of cancers into one that may help many more patients—especially those who have tumors that currently resist treatment.

A COMMUNITY OF HOPE

What made these Forums special wasn’t just the science—it was the people. Early-career researchers learned from established leaders. Clinicians who see patients every day shared insights with laboratory scientists. Ideas that seemed impossible in isolation became achievable when the right minds connected.

Each meeting represented hundreds of hours of planning, thousands of miles traveled, and countless conversations. But they also represented something more: a global community united by a single purpose—to understand cancer better and to translate that understanding into functional treatments.

The collaborations forged and insights gained in 2025 are already shaping the next generation of cancer research and treatment approaches that will benefit patients for years to come.

For more information about future Forums or to learn about sponsorship opportunities, please visit our scientific website **FORBECKFORUMS.ORG**. Together, we can accelerate the future of cancer care.



SIPS FOR SCIENCE

A RIEDEL WINE GLASS TASTING EXPERIENCE SUPPORTING CANCER RESEARCH.

Sponsored by

Lake Geneva OUTDOORS

APRIL 9, 2026
CELEBRATION ON WELLS

FORBECKFOUNDATION.ORG/EVENTS

THE 2026 SPRING FORBECK SCHOLARS

CANCER AND AGING - CONVERGENT AND OPPOSING FORCES



Claire Han, PhD, DNP, APRN-CNP
The James - The Ohio State University
Sponsor: Nancy Geldermann

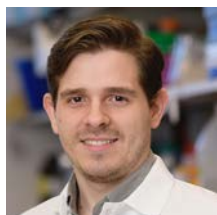
Claire uses AI and clinical data to predict chemotherapy side effects in aging patients with colorectal cancer. Her work integrates biological aging markers and social factors to improve treatment decisions and patient outcomes.



Eric Sun, PhD
Stanford University
Sponsor: Jim and Jo Ellen Vanek

Eric studies the shared biology of aging and cancer using spatial and single-cell genomics. He develops computational tools to measure aging to predict how interventions affect cells and tissues.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF CELLULAR PLASTICITY IN CANCER



Rodrigo Romero, PhD
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
Sponsor: Laura Schiavoni and Brian Willard

Rodrigo investigates how cancer cells change identity to resist therapy. His work focuses on the retinoblastoma gene (RB1) which has been identified as a master regulator of the cell cycle. Despite its name the gene has been shown to be involved in a variety of different cancers and Rodrigo is studying prostate cancer using single-cell and spatial genomics.



Clint Stalneck, PhD
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Sponsor: Celeste Gleeson

The RAS gene codes for another protein involved in regulating cell growth and differentiation and mutations within the gene are found in around 30% of cancers. Clint is studying how RAS-driven cancers adapt to targeted therapies. He uses systems-level signaling analyses to uncover mechanisms of resistance which can lead to new treatment strategies.

FORBECK ON THE FOREFRONT PODCAST • INSIDE THE SCIENCE YOU SUPPORT

When the Forbeck Foundation welcomed Pam Wenc to its Board in spring of 2025, we knew we were gaining a powerhouse. What we did not yet know was how quickly her connections would create new opportunities for the Foundation and for our community.

One of those connections was to Ed Mallof, former President of MAN Marketing in Chicago and now retired in Arizona, although retirement has hardly slowed him down. Like so many in the Forbeck community, Ed has chosen to invest his time and expertise in advancing mission-driven work.

What began as a simple coffee meeting grew into a meaningful partnership. It reflects something we see again and again at Forbeck, when passionate people come together, progress accelerates.

Because of the strength of our community, the partnership with Ed led to the launch of "Forbeck on the Forefront", a new podcast now available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

In 15 minutes or less, each episode translates complex cancer research into accessible, engaging conversations. Drawing from interviews with past Forbeck Forum chairs, the podcast offers a behind-the-scenes look at the ideas your generosity helps support. Each episode is carefully reviewed by scientists to ensure clarity and accuracy.

IF YOU HAVE EVER WONDERED WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE A FORBECK FORUM, WHAT BREAKTHROUGHS ARE EMERGING, AND WHY SUSTAINED INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH MATTERS, THIS PODCAST IS YOUR INVITATION INSIDE.

We hope you will take a few minutes to listen and share these podcasts within your own circles. This is one more way our community can jointly advance understanding and accelerate progress into finding cures for the disease. Listen @ forbeckfoundation.org/media.



PAM AND RAY WENC WITH ED MALLOF (RIGHT)

ALEJANDRO SWEET-CORDERO, MD • CHIEF, DIVISION OF PEDIATRIC ONCOLOGY AT UCSF
SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER



The Forbeck Foundation gathered its community of junior scientists, mentors, and cancer research leaders for the annual Fall Scholar Retreat, held October 2–5 at The Abbey Resort in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The retreat, a cornerstone of the Foundation’s Scholar Program, brought together an outstanding interdisciplinary group of investigators from institutions across the United States, Europe, and Asia — united by a shared commitment to accelerating progress against cancer.

The retreat featured research presentations from sixteen Scholars, each offering a window into their latest work across a wide range of cancer biology topics. Presentations were designed to spark discussion rather than simply report results, with participants encouraged to engage in real-time dialogue — a hallmark of the Forbeck meeting format. Mentors for this year’s retreat included Kristina Cole, MD, PhD (Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia), Scott L. Coven, DO, MPH (Indiana University), Lucy A. Godley, MD, PhD (Northwestern University), Kimryn Rathmell, MD, PhD (The Ohio State University), Alejandro Sweet-Cordero, MD (University of California, San Francisco), and Andrei Thomas-Tikhonenko, PhD (University of Pennsylvania).



Beyond the science, a rich slate of discussions addressed the broader landscape of a career in cancer research. Participants and mentors engaged in candid conversations about the role of basic versus translational biomedical research, and how both remain essential to meaningful progress in treating the disease. **Collaboration — a foundational value of the Forbeck Foundation since its inception — was a recurring theme, with attendees sharing examples of how cross-disciplinary partnerships have reshaped their own research.** Equally emphasized was the importance of asking the right questions and learning to identify and pursue problems that can genuinely move the cancer field forward.

Scholars also explored the human dimensions of a research career. Discussions on resilience reminded attendees that setbacks are an inevitable part of scientific research and that perseverance is as important as talent. Mentors encouraged scholars to embrace the idea that there is no single road to success, and that diverse career paths can each lead to meaningful contributions. The value of mentorship — both receiving it and eventually providing it to the next generation — emerged as a theme that resonated deeply across sessions.

The group also tackled timely challenges facing the scientific community: how to adapt to the rapid pace of change in both science and academia, how to counter anti-science thinking and engage the public as effective communicators and educators, and how to thoughtfully approach the emergence of artificial intelligence as both a research tool and a force reshaping the scientific enterprise. Advocacy and public engagement were highlighted as responsibilities that scientists at all career stages are increasingly called upon to embrace.

AS ALWAYS, THE RETREAT CONCLUDED WITH THE FOUNDATION’S ANNUAL BLUE JEAN BALL, GIVING SCHOLARS A MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH FAMILIES AFFECTED BY CANCER — A POWERFUL REMINDER OF THE HUMAN STAKES BEHIND EVERY DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM.

MEET AND GREET AT LAGO IN LAKE ZURICH, IL

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2026

Join the Forbeck Foundation community to celebrate our collaborative model, where leading cancer researchers turn conversations into breakthroughs for patients.

Meet scientists **Lucy A. Godley, MD, PhD** (Northwestern and Forbeck SAB member), **Yogesh Goyal, PhD** (Northwestern), and **Jeffrey Rathmell, PhD** (University of Chicago), connect with Foundation leaders and supporters, and see how collaboration accelerates discoveries that improve patient outcomes.



FORBECKFOUNDATION.ORG/EVENTS

SENTIMENTS TOWARD KINDNESS IN SCIENCE



STORY BY
SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

CLARK C. CHEN, MD, PHD
DIRECTOR, BRAIN TUMOR PROGRAM AT BROWN HEALTH

W. KIMRYN RATHMELL, MD, PHD, MMHC
CEO OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COMPREHENSIVE
CANCER CENTER



The James



As physician-scientists, we have come to appreciate the profound cultural divide between clinical practice and basic science research. Fundamentally, the patient-doctor interaction is built upon human connection, where excellence in clinical care is generally met with gratitude. A well-crafted surgery, a life-altering decision, and compassionate gestures are recognized by both those we serve and from our peers. This feedback loop reinforces empathy and reminds us that medicine, at its core, is a relational practice.

Excellence in scientific inquiry, by contrast, is built on rigorous scrutiny and criticism. That rigor is largely implemented through anonymized peer review, a system designed to protect objectivity. At the same time, the system can also foster a tone that feels impersonal, harsh, or even adversarial. When criticism is delivered without names or faces attached, it becomes easier to forget the human effort behind obtaining the data. Over time, this dynamic has made harshness seem like the norm, a pattern we internalize and unintentionally teach to our trainees.

The consequences of this culture are not abstract. Harsh or dismissive reviews take a real toll on morale, creativity, and the willingness to take intellectual risks. In an era of dwindling funding, when every submission feels existential, a cutting critique can land not as scientific discourse but as a personal blow. It erodes confidence, narrows ambition, and pushes talented scientists toward safer, smaller questions. Worse yet, many talented individuals simply leave the field altogether.

While it can be argued that those who do not enjoy this “scientific” process never truly belong, this argument collapses under even modest scrutiny. Scientific discovery is inherently unpredictable, and history shows that breakthroughs come from every background, and working style. If our culture pushes out anyone, we are shrinking the very pool of talent capable of generating novel insight.

“Kindness in science should not be misconstrued as a compromise; it is a catalyst for resilience, innovation, and shared progress.”

Yet there is a path forward to build a community that encourages honest, rigorous discussion while remaining both supportive and kind. Scientists are driven by curiosity, and even in a competitive landscape, the desire to expand discovery is stronger than the forces that divide us.

Delivering candid, constructive criticism is easier said than done. Unlike leadership or conflict-management training, there is almost no structured preparation for giving scientific feedback that is rigorous yet not unduly harsh. Given the demands placed upon scientists, the last thing any of us needs is another mandatory training module. Yet the absence of guidance leaves a real gap in how we support one another.

The flip side of a thoughtful critique is learning how to receive it well, a skill that is rarely acknowledged yet essential to sustaining a healthy scientific discourse. Doing so requires intentional preparation to interpret feedback with nuance, separating substance from tone.

Funding agencies and institutional leadership can help shape a culture of kindness in scientific criticism by creating Forums that define and cultivate the skills required to give and interpret feedback. They can support groups that normalize candid discussion and make these practices part of everyday scientific life. Journals and funding agencies play an important role in setting expectations for how feedback should be exchanged, just as they do for other core aspects of scientific inquiry. They can further advance this effort by encouraging and disseminating research on best practices related to peer review. Together, these efforts signal that humane, rigorous critique is not an optional courtesy but a shared professional standard.

Scientists and clinicians are, above all, human – driven and curious yet vulnerable to doubts and disillusionment that affect all of us. Building a community like the one fostered within the Forbeck Foundation, one that recognizes this humanity and supports one another, is essential to sustaining the scientific enterprise. By fostering an environment grounded in respect and encouragement, we not only retain talent but also empower the next generation to pursue bold ideas with confidence and purpose.



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THOUGHTS ON OUR RECIPE FOR SUCCESS



LUCY A. GODLEY, MD, PHD • NORTHWESTERN MEDICINE
SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

THE FORBECK FORUMS ARE LEGENDARY WITHIN THE CANCER COMMUNITY. No other cancer meeting is conducted with Forbeck's intimate nature: 15-20 cancer investigators of all faculty ranks, comprising basic scientists and clinical investigators meet over 2 1/2 days to discuss one current topic in cancer biology from diverse perspectives. They are joined by two Forbeck Scholars, who are about to or have just started their own laboratories and benefit from the networking that happens during mealtimes and fun events.

Forbeck Forums have some quirks that we hold dear, because we think that they contribute to the meaningful interactions that occur during the meeting and sustain relationships afterwards. First, attendees are required to attend the entire meeting. Second, presentations are 30-45 minutes long and are given using five slides. This shocks many first-time attendees who are used to giving such talks with the benefit of 30 or more slides. At first, people could not imagine how they could speak for more than half an hour with only five slides. However, once they listen to the first talk and see how people barely make it through three slides, they relax—There are so many interruptions with eager and excited questions that presenters rarely make it through all of their slides. This gave us an idea...

Just when we thought the Forbeck Forums couldn't be improved, we decided in 2025 to institute a few new "rules" ... and we may have hit upon the secret recipe: We did not allow open computers and only TWO slides. We asked people to put away their computers and cell phones to allow them no distractions and to really focus on the presenters. We figured since no presenter ever really makes it to their fifth slide anyway, we would be bold and encourage even fewer slides. We made sure to have a whiteboard and magic markers available and encouraged people to try NO slides at all. Many opted for this style and gave their talk like a "chalk talk" where the presenter talks and draws at the same time.



To our delight, people followed the new rules and were incredibly well engaged in the meetings. Many told us that the Forbeck Forums remain their favorite meetings, precisely because of the style we have adopted. So, have we come up with the perfect recipe? Only time will tell, but we certainly embrace our new format and look forward to the exciting 2026 meeting schedule!

ANNUAL GOLF OUTING & MAHJONG

SUMMER 2026 • LAKE GENEVA, WISCONSIN



LEARN MORE & REGISTER AT [FORBECKFOUNDATION.ORG/EVENTS](https://forbeckfoundation.org/events)

TASTE OF
Lake Geneva
TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026

OAKFIRE
PIZZA, HOPS, FIRE & BEER
STOP #1

The Bottle Shop
wine & more
STOP #2

GENEVA TAP HOUSE
STOP #3

JOIN US FOR THE TASTE OF LAKE GENEVA
SUPPORTING CANCER RESEARCH HOSTED BY
THE FORBECK FOUNDATION

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TURNING CONNECTION INTO PROGRESS

JAMIE FORBECK COLLINS

FORBECK FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the spring of 2025, Forbeck Scholar Lisa Sudmeier, MD, PhD, introduced me to Helaine Bader. Helaine’s son, Theo, died at age 17 from leptomeningeal cancer, a form of brain cancer.

Like the Forbeck family, Helaine and her family have taken unimaginable loss and transformed it into action. She is determined to raise awareness of leptomeningeal cancer and accelerate progress for every family facing this devastating diagnosis. That determination is now catalyzing scientific collaboration.

Through Lisa’s introduction and Helaine’s perseverance, the Forbeck Foundation and the Leptomeningeal Cancer Foundation will partner to convene a Forum dedicated to advancing understanding and treatment of the disease. Helaine connected with Adrienne Boire, MD, PhD, of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, a past participant of the Foundation’s Cellular Reprogramming and Metastatic Disease Forum, and together they submitted a proposal to bring leading experts together to focus on this urgent challenge.

The Foundation’s Scientific Advisory Board responded with resoundingly positive feedback, recognizing both the scientific opportunity and the urgency of the moment.

“Recent observations, together with advances in liquid biopsy analytics, large-scale multimodal data computational approaches, and increasing prevalence of leptomeningeal metastasis create an unparalleled opportunity for rapid advances in understanding for leptomeningeal cancer.”

ADRIENNE BOIRE, MD, PHD OF MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER

We believe meaningful progress happens when scientists, non-profit organizations and families work together—each contributing their unique strengths. When interaction meets expertise, momentum follows. The Forum on Leptomeningeal Cancer is in the early planning stages and is anticipated to take place in Beaver Creek, Colorado, in the spring of 2027—where so many transformative scientific conversations have begun.

In 2025, our collaboration with Curing Kids Cancer led to a series of impactful Forums addressing the long-term challenges pediatric cancer survivors face, including secondary malignancies and the role of emerging technology in improving care and outcomes. We are already seeing the ripple effects of those conversations, and we look forward to the discoveries that will emerge from this new partnership.



HELAINÉ BADER,
DOUG AND THEO SKINNER

WE ARE ALWAYS GRATEFUL WHEN MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY HELP SPARK THESE CONNECTIONS. MY FATHER WAS ONE OF THE BEST NETWORKERS I HAVE EVER KNOWN, AND CARRYING THAT SPIRIT FORWARD, BUILDING BRIDGES THAT ACCELERATE DISCOVERY, IS ONE OF THE WAYS WE HONOR HIM.

If you know either individuals or organizations who should be part of this work, we would love to hear from you.



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LEPTOMENINGEAL CANCER FOUNDATION @ LMCANCER.ORG

CANCER'S LEADING THINKERS. TOGETHER IN ONE ROOM.

2025 BLUE JEAN BALL

ROCK THE *Ruby*
ANNUAL BLUE JEAN BALL



CELEBRATING OUR 40TH ANNIVERSARY



CANCER'S LEADING THINKERS. TOGETHER IN ONE ROOM.

GOLF OUTING • MAHJONG



COMO CRAWL • TASTE OF LG



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"Thank you again for thinking of me to attend the meeting and for organizing such a stimulating and well-run Forum. As a biochemist who works quite far from the clinical side of things, I found the discussions eye-opening and learned a great deal. It was a real privilege to engage with such a dynamic and thoughtful group. I share your hope that the connections made at Forbeck will grow into fruitful collaborations. The format was incredibly effective in sparking new ideas and fostering genuine dialogue."

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